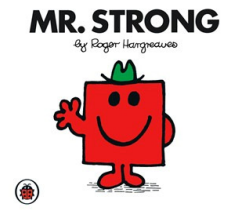




# STRENGTH



Written by Naomi Russell

## **S-T-R-E-N-G-T-H** *(dictionary definition)*

- ◇ the quality or state of being strong; bodily or muscular power; vigor.
- ◇ mental power, force, or vigor.
- ◇ moral power, firmness, or courage.
- ◇ power by reason of influence, authority, resources, numbers, etc.



**What is Strength?** What makes people feel strong? What characteristics are generally considered to be signs of strength? Is strength a good thing? Strength can be an important issue for young people. Young people, especially boys, might feel that they are expected to grow up to be 'big and strong'. Physical strength seems easier to measure and quantify, but what other types of strength are there? What makes a person feel strong? What is moral strength? Is there a connection between moral, emotional and physical strength? Young people might need to access a sense of inner strength in order to forge out own their own identities in the face of adult and peer pressure to conform. Young people might need to find strength in order to voice their feelings and thoughts, to stand up for what they believe in. What about emotional strength? Is it viewed as a sign or strength or weakness to experience emotions and express how you feel? Explore some of these questions and issues using the following Jewish texts and activities.

## What makes people feel strong? What makes people feel weak?

The sages say that:

“Three things sap a person’s strength:  
anxiety, travel, and sin”

R. Tanhum son of R. Hiyya said: “Four things sap a person’s strength: sin, travel, fasting, and the oppressor’s rule.”

R. Tanhuma said: “Trouble also saps a person’s strength.”

**(B. Git 70a) Sefer Ha’Aggadah**

### **Ideas for how to use this text:**

- Explain that we will be looking at the idea of ‘strength’. Pass around the image cards (without the words) and ask the group to guess what they think each image might represent. Or split into teams and do this as a competition, for example by separating the images and the words and playing a game of ‘snap’ or ‘memory’ trying to match up each word with the relevant image.
- Explain that each card represents behaviours or experiences which can relate to strength. Ask the group to discuss and put the cards into 2 categories: things which can make people feel stronger and things which can ‘sap’ (take away) their strength.
- Allow space for everyone to share opinions on what ‘builds’ strength and what ‘takes’ it away. Highlight particular cards that you think are most interesting and discuss – What is it about this experience or behaviour which might make people feel strong or weak? What are some examples of when and how this happens?

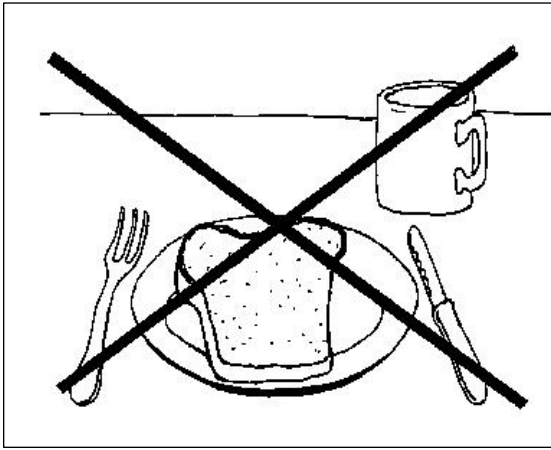
*General points to discuss:*

- What are different types of strength?
- Is there a connection between physical and emotional or mental strength?
- What impressions does society give us about what it means to be strong?

- You can read the actual text with the group or simply highlight the cards which reflect the content of the text and explain that some of the Talmudic Sages suggested that these particular behaviours or experiences 'sap' strength. Ask the group why they think the sages might have said that, whether they agree, whether there is anything else particular to modern day society which they would add to the list of things which 'sap' strength.

Options to highlight:

- **Praise:** Do people often give or receive praise? If not, why not? How does it feel to give or receive praise? (Giving people positive feedback and appreciation can be a great way to build self esteem and help somebody to feel strong.)
- **Self awareness:** What is self awareness? Do you think it is good to be aware of how you behave, of your character traits or of the things you are good at and not so good at? How might self awareness make a person stronger?
- **Talking to a friend:** In what ways could friendship make us stronger? Is it a sign of weakness or strength to talk to a friend about how you feel, or to ask for help?
- **Coffee:** Why do people drink coffee? Do the effects of coffee make a person stronger or weaker? (Coffee can make you feel more awake and stronger for a while but too much of it is not good for your body. Are there other things which have that effect too?)
- **Sin:** What is a sin? In what way might 'sinning' or doing things which may be wrong or immoral make a person feel weaker or stronger? Think about strength in relation to 'sins' such as lashon hara (gossiping about others) or stealing. Is there anything about gossiping which makes people feel strong? What is moral strength? Is there a difference between the temporary sense of power, strength or thrill which someone might get from doing something like gossiping or stealing, compared with the possible sense of strength gained from doing good deeds, being kind towards others or resisting opportunities to cause harm?
- **Alternative activity:** split into groups and give out arts and crafts resources and/or recyclable material. Ask the group to build a tower which can support a few small items for as long as possible (using only the resources available). Once they have made the tower, give them a few more items to place on the tower which add to its weight. See if the tower can still stand. Then give out a few items which add to the tower and bolster its strength. See if the tower can still stand. Then ask the group how they think this relates to strength in real life. Give out the words and image cards (relating to behaviours) and ask the group to discuss each one and stick it on the element of the tower they feel it relates to – ie if it is a 'strengthening' behaviour or experience, stick it to the element of the tower which was strong and held firm. Then discuss what the group think are behaviours which help them to feel strong. Utilize any of the questions above and introduce the text if / where appropriate.



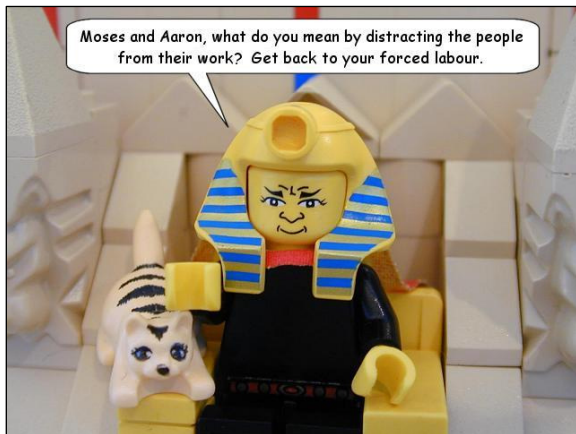
**FASTING**



**STRESS OR ANXIETY**



**EXCLUSION**



**OPPRESSION**



**TRAVEL**



**SIN**



**COFFEE**





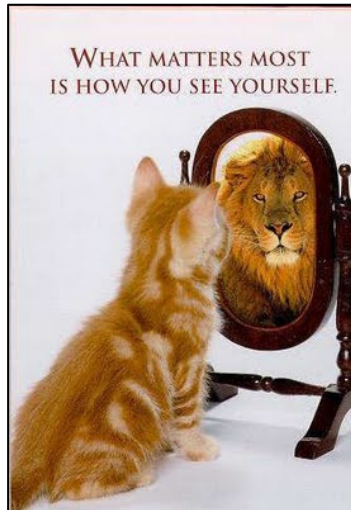
**EXERCISE**



**SLEEP**



**TALKING TO A FRIEND**



**SELF AWARENESS**



**HEALTHY EATING**



**RECEIVING PRAISE**



## Free or Fortified?

When Moses sent them (the spies) to scout the land of Canaan, he said to them

“Go up there into the Negev...and see what kind of country it is. See whether the people that dwell there are strong or weak” (Numbers 13:17)



The Midrash elaborates on this:

‘Look carefully’ Moses said, ‘How can you tell their strength? If they live in open camps, they are strong, since they seem to rely on their own strength. But if they live in fortresses, they are feeble, and their hearts are timid.’

### Questions to discuss:

- *What does this text mean to you?*
- *Why might people build fortresses?*
- *Why might living in a fortress be a sign of ‘timid hearts’? Do you agree?*
- *How might ‘open camps’ represent strength?*
- *In what ways might a community which lives in ‘open’ camps be stronger than one which lives in a ‘fortress’ or behind barricades? Do you agree?*
- *What types of ‘fortresses’ or barriers do people build around themselves or their communities?*
- *Do you think that openness is as a sign of strength?*



## Mighty Wise?

Pirkei Avot Chapter 4 verse 1

Ben Zoma said: Who is **wise**? One who learns from all people, as it is written (Psalm 119:99) "I have gained understanding from all my teachers."

Who is **mighty**? A person who subdues their passions, as it is written (Proverbs 16:32) "One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city."

ד,א בן זומא אומר, איזה הוא חכם--הלמד מכל אדם, שנאמר "מכל מלמדיי, השכלתי" (תהילים קיט,צט). איזה הוא גיבור--הכובש את יצרו, שנאמר "טוב ארך אפיים, מגיבור" (משלי טז,לב).

What does '**wisdom**' mean to you?

What is '**wise**' about being open to learning from everyone?

What does '**mighty**' mean to you?

What is '**mighty**' about being able to subdue or calm your anger?

In what situations do you think it is better or '**mightier**' to stay calm?

In what situations do you think it may be '**mighty**' to show anger or express other powerful emotions? How?

## Ideas for how to use the 'Mighty Wise' Pirkei Avot text:

- Explain the following real-life situation: In a Premier League football game, Manchester United's Wayne Rooney scored a hat-trick and then promptly ran over to TV cameras shouting and using foul language. Was this an understandable 'heat of the moment' celebratory outburst or an offensive and aggressive act? Give out the articles below and ask groups to discuss and form their opinions about his behaviour. Then refer to the text and discuss some of the related questions and / or any of the following questions:
- What triggered Rooney's outburst? How do you think Rooney's behaviour impacted on how he is viewed? What behaviour is considered to be 'sporting'? What qualities in sports players do you consider a sign of strength? How does this compare to how strength is viewed in everyday life? Is it possible for a sports person to display 'might' or 'strength' without aggression or intimidation? How? Do you think it is a sign of strength to be able to channel your aggression? In situations where our actions impact on others, what are appropriate ways of dealing with or expressing aggression or anger?
- Alternative activity: ask the group to come up with headlines, draw pictures and write opinion pieces based on the following or other scenarios. Alternatively they could act out the scenarios and role play different types of responses and ways of dealing with each situation. Discuss - What might the different people involved feel about the situation? What do you think is the 'strongest' or mightiest' way of dealing with each situation?

### Scenarios:

- A parent shouts at their child for failing to tidy their room after the second time of asking
  - Someone gets upset or angry with their close friend for passing on a secret and breaking their trust
  - A person is passionate about vegetarianism, protecting animals and the environment. They feel frustrated when their friends do not understand why this is important to them and are dismissive about the issues.
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- Alternative activity: Ask the group to come up with ideas of things which might make people feel angry. Each time someone shares an idea, gradually blow up a balloon, until it is so full that it bursts. Then blow up another balloon and ask the group to come up with ideas for how to deal with the anger inducing situations constructively or to release the anger, allow a bit of air out of the balloon each time a helpful idea is given. Ask the group what they think the balloon might show in terms of how anger can impact on us. Discuss the 'pros' and 'cons' of different ways of dealing with anger or irritation. Introduce the text and ask the group what they think about the idea that a person who subdues their passions is mighty.



### **'If anger makes Wayne Rooney brilliant, he can swear as much as he likes'**

If the FA wants to stop swearing being broadcast it should keep microphones out of players' faces during matches. Some were upset by the aggression with which he celebrated his hat-trick, but it was probably the same aggression, fuelled in the dressing room at half-time, or the result of his team's dismal performance in the first half, that inspired him to score it. If you can't have one without the other and you definitely want one, you need to accept the other.



### **'Rooney - rejecting role model responsibilities?'**

When Wayne Rooney was celebrating scoring his hat-trick against West Ham he ran over to journalists and swore directly at the tv cameras. Was this an understandable momentary expression of his passion for the game and relief at scoring a vital goal, or an offensive outburst watched by millions of children and no doubt later imitated on many school playgrounds? Surely by now Rooney can learn to publicly express his strong feelings without using bad language or aggression? Instead he unleashed powerful emotions in a way which showed no regard for the possible impact on others. Rooney is a role model whether he likes it or not, so he should take a look in the mirror and think about how to behave in a way which has a positive impact on young people.

